

MY LADY OF THE NORTH

The Love Story of a Gray Jacket

by RANDALL PARRISH

Author of "WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING"

ILLUSTRATIONS BY ARTHUR T. WILLIAMSON

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ENTERED AT STATIONER'S HALL, LONDON

SYNOPSIS.

The story opens in a Confederate tent at a critical stage of the Civil War. Gen. Lee imparts to Capt. Wayne an important message to Longstreet. Accompanied by Sgt. Craig, an old army scout, Wayne starts on his mission. They get within the lines of the enemy and in the darkness Wayne is taken for a Federal officer and a young lady on horseback is given in his charge. She is a northern girl and attempts to escape. One of the horses succumbs and Craig goes through with the dispatches, while Wayne and My Lady of the North are left alone. They seek shelter in a hut and entering it in the dark a huge intruder attacks Wayne. The girl shoots the brute just in time. The owner of the hut, Jed Bungay, and his wife appear and soon a party of horsemen approach. They are led by a man claiming to be Red Lowe, but who proves to be Maj. Brennan, a Federal officer whom the Union girl recognizes. He orders the arrest of Wayne as a spy and he is brought before Sheridan, who threatens him with death unless he reveals the secret message. Wayne believes Edith Brennan to be the wife of Maj. Brennan. He is rescued by Jed Bungay, who starts to reach Gen. Lee, while Wayne in disguise penetrates to the ballroom, beneath which he had been imprisoned. He is introduced to a Miss Minor and barely escapes being unmasked. Edith Brennan, recognizing Wayne, says she will save him. Security is passed through the lines, they are confronted by Brennan, who is knocked senseless. Then, bidding Edith adieu, Wayne makes a dash for liberty. He encounters Bungay, who reaches the Lee camp and is sent with reinforcements to join Barry. In the battle of Shenandoah the regiment is overwhelmed, and Wayne, while in the hospital, is visited by Edith Brennan. Wayne and Bungay are sent on a scouting detail.

CHAPTER XXVI.—Continued.

He looked at me in surprise. "I reckon, cap, as how ye don't know much 'bout whar's a goin' on in ther valley fer ther las' few months," he said soberly, rubbing down his mule as he spoke. "Tell ye what, thar jist hain't no plantation houses left thar now, thet's a fac', leastwise not north-o' ther lines we uns sorter hol' onto yit. Sheridan he played hell with his cavalry raids, an' what the blue-bellies left ther durned guerillas an' bush-whackers wiped up es clean es a slate. Durn if a crow wudn't starve ter death in ther valley now. Why, cap, them thar deserters an' sick truck is organized now till they're mighty nigh an army, an' they don't skeer fer nuthin' les' ner a regiment. I see more ner a hundred an' fifty in one bunch up on ther White Briar two week ago, an' they're worse ner a parcel er pirates. I reckon as how they got Marlur, but I'll bet she giv' em a hot ol' time afore she done quit."

Rumors of this state of affairs to the north and west of our defending lines had already reached me—indeed, the verification had formed part of my instructions; but Bungay's homely yet graphic description made the situation appear terribly real, and my thought went instantly forth to those I knew who might even then be exposed to this great and unexpected danger.

The very conception of Edith Brennan in such hands as these was agony. I felt I could never rest until assured of her safety, and since my order granted me full authority to prolong my journey, I might ascertain whether or not she yet remained within the valley.

"Jed," I asked, my mind finally settled, "do you know the old Minor plantation?"

"Ol' Jedge Minor's place? Sure; it's up on ther south branch of ther Cow-skin."

"Have those fellows got down that far yet?"

"Wal, I reckon not, but durn if I know fer sure, cap."

"How long would it take us to reach there?"

"'Bout two days, I reckon."

I turned and looked at my men in some perplexity. They were scattered along the edge of the road, and only one group had taken the precaution to build a fire. The sergeant lay flat upon his back on a grassy knoll.

"Ebers," I said sternly.

He arose ponderous, and came forward with a decidedly halting gait.

"Vos I sent for?" he asked.

"Yes," I said; "I want you to have the men get ther supper at once, as we shall be obliged to ride a good portion of the night. Get the men to ther supper. We shall go on in an hour."

How often since had I smiled at the expression upon his solemn round face as he turned ruefully away!

CHAPTER XXVII.

An Embarrassing Situation.

It was well into the third day when we came down into the fertile valley of the Cowskin. It had proven an uneventful ride thus far, for we had met with no adventures and had observed little worthy of consideration from a military standpoint.

While constantly observant of those points regarding which I had been dispatched, my one overmastering thought during all those hours was the possibility of again meeting with Edith Brennan and proving of some assistance to her. Her greeting of me in the Federal hospital had been so sweetly gracious, so marked with tender sympathy, while the memory of her words, and even more of the look which accompanied them, had so remained with me in encouragement that I longed to encounter her again. God knows what I hoped for, for I knew well it must all inevitably end in despair, yet like the moth I must continue to singe my wings until the

flame devoured me. Now, however, as we actually drew near to where I supposed she might be, I felt my earlier courage fast deserting me. Nor was I furnished with even the slightest excuse for pressing on; my orders did not positively compel me to proceed, and nothing appeared along the way to lead me to suppose that harm of any kind threatened that peaceful valley. Everything meeting my eyes evidenced that here, at least, was with its attendant horrors had not come. Totally without the beaten track of those great armies which had battled so fiercely for the Shenandoah, it had been traversed only by a few scouting and foraging parties, and so short had been their stay that even the rail fences remained undisturbed to guard the fields, and nowhere did I note outward signs of devastation. It was Virginia as I recalled it in those old days of peace and plenty, before civil strife had sown the land with death.

What possible excuse, then, had I for going there? In my own heart I knew I had none, or one so poor and selfish I scarcely durst whisper it even to myself; yet I rode steadily on, impelled by my own weakness, or drawn irresistibly by fate—whichever the real cause I know not—I would at least look upon those walls that had once sheltered her, would learn if possible if she was yet there. Then—well, in the bondage of my passion I hoped for what might happen, as every lover does.

It must have been two o'clock; we had baited our horses, I remember, an hour previous; and the Sergeant had enjoyed his noonday siesta beneath the shade of a great bush bearing purple blossoms. The road we had been traveling since early morning wound in and out among great trees, and crossed and recrossed the little stream called the Cowskin until I almost thought we had lost our way. We met with no one in all the long day's riding, not even a stray negro, and indeed it was some hours since we had passed a house of any kind. Leaving the brook behind us we toiled slowly up a long hill, and at the top Bungay, riding beside me, pointed to the westward.

"Cap," he said, "thar is ther Minor place."

The very sight of it in the distance was a thrill—a great white house placed well back from the road and almost hidden from sight by fine, large trees an old-fashioned, big-roomed house it looked to be, built after the colonial type, a wide veranda upon three sides, with fluted columns to support the overhanging roof.

"Hain't no signs es fer es I kin see of any trouble havin' curred thar," Jed said slowly, his shrewd gray eyes roaming over the peaceful scene. "Somebody ter hum tew, fer ther chimney is a smokin'."

Of course, now I was there, the only sensible thing for me to do would have been to ride openly to the front door, and thus learn all I desired. But what man who loves, who is continually swayed by hopes and fears, by strength and weakness, ever does the sensible thing? I had certainly intended doing so at the start, but now my nerve failed me. She was the wife of another. I could not confess I had ventured to come to her in love, nor could I look into those clear, honest, questioning eyes and lie.

"Halt!" I ordered. "Sergeant!"

"I am here, Captain."

"Take your men down into that hollow yonder, and remain there until I return. Better post a sentry on the hill here."

"It will be done, Captain."

"I shall not, probably, be absent more than an hour, so don't permit the men to stray."

"Dot is it, Captain. I will be mit dem all over."

I rode down alone into the thick woods at the foot of the hill, and dismounting, tied my horse to a sapling. Then on foot I struck across the fields, my intention being to come in by the way of the negro quarters at the rear, in hope of meeting some one from whom I might inquire relative to the great house and its inmates.

It was a slight upward trend of land I had to traverse, and although the house was a most slightly object and stood upon the very summit of the elevation, yet so surrounded was it with trees, both fruit and ornamental, I was enabled to make but little of its situation until I approached the out-buildings. I met with no one, nor could I perceive any negroes about the slave quarters. Yet the place did not bear the appearance of desertion. There were horses in the stable, a cat was curled up on one of the cabin door steps, and smoke continued to pour in a dull yellow cloud from the kitchen chimney. Altogether there was much in the situation to puzzle ever, and I no longer regretted that I had exercised some caution in my approach.

The orchard, with the remains of a garden, lay between the house and the stable, protected by a low fence of whitened pickets. So far as I could observe, it contained no occupant, and I pushed open the gate and started down a narrow cinder-path which led between two rows of low bushes. To

right of me was an extensive grape-arbor, completely covered with vines, the fresh green leaves forming a delightful contrast to the deep blue sky beyond. As I came opposite an opening leading into this arbor I suddenly caught the flutter of drapery and stopped instantly, my heart throbbing like a frightened girl's. It was quite dark beneath the vine shadow, and I could make out no more than that a woman stood there, her back toward me, busied at some task. Possibly she felt my presence, for all at once she glanced around, and upon perceiving me gave vent to a quick exclamation of terror.

"Pardon me," I said hastily, and removing my hat, "but you have nothing to fear."

There was a moment's hesitancy on her part, and I knew I was being scrutinized by a pair of bright eyes.

"Surely," said a familiar voice. "I cannot be mistaken—you are Captain Wayne."

Before I could even answer she stepped forth from her partial concealment and advanced toward me with cordially extended hands. It was Celia Minor.

"Well, of all men!" she cried gayly, her dark eyes smiling a most kindly welcome. "And Edith and I were

speaking about you only yesterday. That is, I was, for really I do not recall now that Edith made any remark apropos of the subject. You have no idea, Captain Wayne, what a hero I have made you out to be. It would make you positively vain if I should confess; why, Arthur has actually become so jealous that he has almost forbidden me even to mention your name in his presence. So when I want to talk about you I am compelled to go to Edith. She hasn't power to stop me, you know, but I'm sure I must bore her awfully. And then to think that when you stood there just now, and I saw your gray uniform, I actually thought the guerillas had come. My heart beats so now I can hardly talk. But how pale and haggard you look—is it that horrible wound which troubles you still?"

"I have been discharged from the hospital only a short time," I answered, as she paused to take breath. "Indeed, this is my first military service for several months, yet I am feeling quite strong again. Mrs. Brennan, then, is still with you?"

"Oh, yes; we have been here all winter long. It has been so dull, for really nothing has happened, and the valley is quite devoid of inhabitants—even the negroes have gone hunting freedom. But Major Brennan and Arthur are to be here this afternoon, and sometime tonight we are all of us going away together."

Eager as I was to meet Brennan, I had no desire that we should meet in the presence of his wife. Better, far better, would it be for me to leave at once and without even seeing her.

"You say you are about to depart?" I asked, determined to learn all possible regarding their plans. "Do you go North?"

"Yes, to Baltimore and Washington. The guerillas are becoming so desperate in this neighborhood that we are actually afraid to remain here longer. They attacked the Cuyler plantation, only ten miles from here, two weeks ago, killed old Mr. Cuyler, turned his

wife out partially dressed in the middle of the night, looted the house of everything it contained of value, and then set it on fire. You see we have no men folks here, except two negroes, who have clung to us because they were so aged they were afraid to leave—just mamma, Edith, my old nurse, and myself. It seems so lonely, and Major Brennan and Arthur both insist it is no longer safe. So they are coming with a cavalry escort to take us all North. I am sure we shall have a splendid time."

"You have experienced no trouble, then, thus far?"

"Oh, none at all—we have not even been bothered by scouting parties. Oh, I do not mean you; you are no bother. But yesterday there was a horrible man here; he came to the kitchen door, and asked all sorts of impudent questions. Mrs. Bungay actually had to threaten him with a gun before he would leave."

"Is Maria Bungay here, then?"

"Why certainly; do you know her? Isn't she a delightful old dear—just as good as a man."

"Her husband is with my party."

"Jed—really? Why, do you know, Maria has got it into her head that he had run away from her. I should so love to witness their meeting; it would be most interesting. But you must come into the house, Captain Wayne; Edith will be overjoyed to see you again, although you know she is never demonstrative, as I am. It must be awfully nice to be always cool and calm, don't you think?"

Determined that I would not be tempted, I yet hesitated, and my vivacious companion too everything for granted at once.

"Oh, before we go in, won't you do me a favor?" she asked. "But of course you will. I was trying to tie this grapevine into place when you surprised me, but I could not hold on with one hand and tie with the other."



"Do You Not See? This is Captain Wayne."

See what I mean?" And placing one slender foot upon a slat of the trellis she lifted herself up until she could barely reach the refractory branch.

"Now," she said, smiling down upon me, "please just hold me here for a moment until I secure this end."

My hand was scarcely upon her in support when the slender slat snapped beneath her weight. As she fell I caught her with both arms. For a moment she lay, panting and startled on my breast; then, as with a little laugh she disengaged herself from my embrace, we stood there hand in hand and face to face with Edith Brennan.

Shall I ever forget the look within her eyes? How plainly I saw it, although she stood half hidden beneath the shadow of the vines. Amazement, incredulity, scorn were expressed there, yet even as I marked them all became merged into proud unconsciousness. She would have turned away without a word, but my companion stopped her.

"Edith," she cried eagerly, "do you not see? This is Captain Wayne."

She turned toward me and slightly inclined her head.

"I recognized Captain Wayne," was her calm answer, "and regret greatly having intruded upon him. It was entirely unintentional, and I have no desire to remain."

I could not have spoken at that moment to save my life. It fairly stunned me to realize the construction she so plainly placed upon the scene just enacted. Not so the girl at my side. Her cheeks flushed with indignation, and her audacity gave her speech which made matters even worse than before.

"You are exceedingly free with your criticisms, Edith," she exclaimed sharply, as the latter turned her back upon us. "Perhaps it would be as well for you first to ascertain the truth."

"You wholly mistake," was the calm reply. "I have not presumed to criticize. Why should I? It is not a matter which interests me in the least. I presume you have no further ob-

jection to my returning to the house?" She did not so much as deign to look again at either of us, but as she moved slowly out of sight Miss Minor turned and looked into my face with questioning eyes. What she may have read there I know not, but she sank back upon a bench and burst into a merry peal of laughter.

"Isn't it perfectly ridiculous!" she cried, as soon as she was able to speak. "Only I do hope she won't tell Arthur."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

We Capture a Courier.

The girl's light burst of laughter aroused me thoroughly to a sense of our situation.

"You seem to derive much amusement from a condition of affairs almost intolerable to me," I said bitterly. "I have always valued most highly the friendship of Mrs. Brennan, but this unfortunate occurrence will doubtless end it."

She glanced up at me, her long lashes wet, but her dark eyes sparkling with mischief.

"Oh, she won't care so far as you are concerned," she exclaimed indifferently. "But I suppose she will think I am perfectly horrid. Well, I don't care if she does; she might have waited and learned the truth first. Wasn't her face a study? And how shall I ever explain to Arthur so that he will understand? I'm sure I have got the worst of it. Oh, Captain Wayne, is my hair all ruffled up? I know I look like a fright. You must come in now, and we will explain to Mrs. Brennan the whole matter. She cannot help believing us both, while I know she would be so cold and proud to me alone."

I shook my head decisively. Perhaps it was better ended so; at least I possessed no courage just then to face her indignation. She might not deem we had concocted our explanation, and would very likely receive it with all the scorn she felt it deserved. Besides, it was clear there was nothing I could do to aid them. I should be now merely an unwelcome intruder. An escort was to be there shortly to convey them northward, and for me to be found in their company by Brennan would only inflame him and add greatly to the embarrassment of his wife's position. Much as I might long for immediate vindication in her sight, the plain duty of true love was to depart at once, and permit time to straighten out the tangle.

"You must pardon me," I hastened to say, standing hat in hand before her, "but it would not be best for me to intrude upon Mrs. Brennan after her late reception. I merely halted here in order to assure myself of your presence and safety. My men are even now waiting for me a few hundred yards away."

"But I wish you to meet Arthur."

"Oh, I think not, Miss Minor. I feel warm friendship for Lieutenant Caton, but we wear different uniforms, serve under different flags, and a meeting here, both with armed forces behind us, would naturally have to be a hostile one. However the Lieutenant and I might consent to a temporary truce, his superior officer, Major Brennan, would not likely prove of the same mind."

"Then you really must go?"

"Unless you specially desire to witness a cavalry skirmish in your front doorway, I certainly consider it best," and I held out my hand. "Surely we part as friends, and I may hope that you will intercede in my behalf with Mrs. Brennan?"

She rose up impulsively.

"How ridiculous; how supremely ridiculous! Why, of course I will, though I don't suppose Edith really cares very much, but she believed it would be highly proper to be shocked. I don't think she likes you so very well anyway, Captain Wayne, for she never will talk about you."

With these cheering words ringing in my ears, and feeling thoroughly defeated in every cherished hope, I strode savagely down the long hill and mounted my horse. How glorious fortune had sufficed me, to be sure, and how extremely small the inspiration left. Well, perhaps I deserved it for ever permitting myself to love one whom I knew to be the wife of another. Doubtless she had seized upon this slight pretext to be rid of me, and was already rejoicing over its easy accomplishment.

In my agitation I forgot entirely the presence of Maria Bungay at the house, and ordering my men into saddle prepared for departure without giving a thought to the little fellow and his domestic troubles. I chose the road leading toward the northwest, for although I had not asked the question I conceived it highly probable that Brennan and his party would ride from the Federal cavalry quarters at Colter's Church, and I had no desire to meet them. They were upon an errand of mercy of far greater importance than my revenge.

As we swung along through the heavily timbered land fringing our road, Bungay pressed his mule into a trot and finally succeeded in ranging up at my side. Even in my disturbed mental condition I was amused at his unique style of riding, although I would not wound him by laughing.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Wonderful Luck.

Rock—Taylor was always a fortunate man, but doesn't it seem wonderful that his luck should stay with him to the very last?

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